



VOICES & VISIONS

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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Fall 2002

The Hand of Fellowship

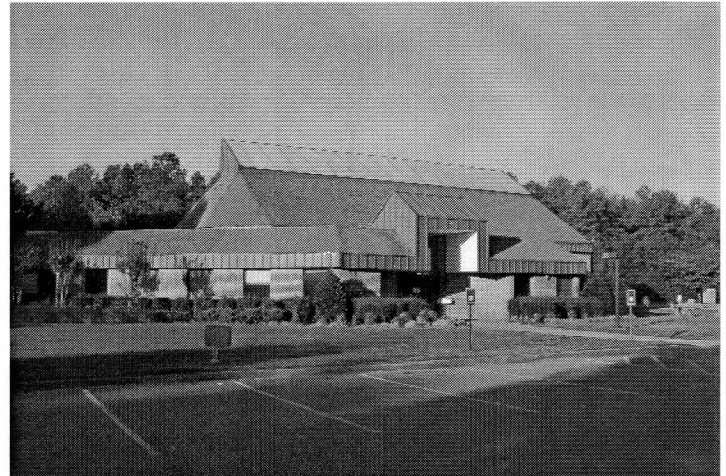
By Mary Kendrick Moore

When an individual joins a church, we customarily extend a hand of greeting, offer celebratory hugs, and engage in numerous ways to get acquainted. But what about when a church joins a denomination? Building community calls for intentional efforts when extending a hand of fellowship means crossing counties and even states. As the Southeast Conference experiences growth through new churches, getting to know each other offers exciting opportunity and challenge.

During the past two years, three well known churches in the metro-Atlanta area have made conscious decisions to unite their voices with the UCC. Each of these congregations was received into the UCC after a period of study and discernment, including a twelve-week course on the history and polity of our denomination. Numerous conversations with church staff and leaders by the Church and Ministry Committee and both conference and national staff opened the door of invitation to the UCC. In addition, their pastors visited the national headquarters in Cleveland this summer to further strengthen their knowledge of the UCC. We have announced their presence among us and said, "Hello." This article offers you a glimpse, beyond a mere introduction, into the lives of these churches.

Church of the Savior Roswell, Georgia

According to Rev. Chris Graham, Church of the Savior is a congregation small in number, but huge in spirit. "The road has not been easy for the church, but over and over again, the members have demonstrated great tenacity about being a church for all people," he shares. Community of faith is a good description of this church where members are serious about relationship and engage



Church of the Savior

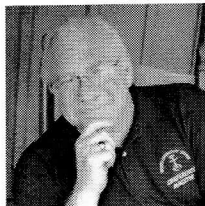
questions like: *What does it mean to have accountability in community? What are the boundaries of a community? What does it mean to commit to a community?* Born out of the Baptist tradition and its wonderful emphasis on freedom, Church of the Savior has stood firm in upholding the freedom of the local congregation to determine, under the Lordship of Christ, its own course of mission and ministry. Members look forward to bringing the strength of this tradition into the United Church of Christ.

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*"I will pour out my Spirit upon all... and your young shall see visions
and your old shall dream dreams." Acts 2:17*



A Letter from the Conference Minister

Sabbath Rest

Dear Friends,

Having just returned from sabbatical leave, rested and renewed, I have been thinking about the word "Sabbath" and what it is that God intends by the words, "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." When I was a child, friends from more pious households than mine were required to spend Sunday quietly around the house after worship and Sunday school. For my childhood friends, Sunday was a time for no play, no homework and no fun. I sometimes drive by an Orthodox synagogue in Atlanta on a Friday evening and observe men, women and children walking to worship and know that they will observe Sabbath by not driving, not turning on electrical switches, and not cooking.

I would like to think of Sabbath or sabbatical not as a time of restrictions and "thou shall nots," but as God's gift of rest and restoration. For me, it is true that life can sometimes be driven and chaotic. Sabbatical was a gift of grace - to have time to mend and renew my relationships with those I love, to read and write, to travel as part of my sabbatical study strengthening new friendships and old, and to bicycle, an activity I enjoy but undertake too rarely.

The purpose of my sabbatical was to explore ways in which to do effective new church development in the UCC. My sabbatical proposal, titled "Building a Firm Foundation: Exploring Effective New Church Development," outlined my plans for study. During my time away, I read about trends in church development and decline, and visited in a number of new church starts across the county, meeting with their leader and pastors. I learned a great deal about leadership development and effective leadership for new church development and renewal of congregations. I believe the new trends we are seeing are the emerging United Church of Christ that is going to take us into the 21st century.

My sabbatical leave was truly a time of restoration, reminding me of the importance of weaving a spirit of balance throughout my life. Sabbatical is a time of renewal - that is, a renewal of perspective, a time of reflection, including physical renewal through rest.

The Sabbath is not simply the seventh day of the week but is a part of a whole matrix of God's economy, an economy of restoration and balance. In God's economy, Israel was to allow fields and orchards to lie fallow and

The Sabbath is not simply the seventh day of the week but is a part of a whole matrix of God's economy, an economy of restoration and balance.

unpicked on the seventh year - the sabbatical year. The spontaneous produce of the fields and orchards during the sabbatical year were to be eaten freely by the poor. During this year, any Israelite who was enslaved was freed from bondage, and any indebtedness was to be forgiven.

In our personal lives we can be prone to excess, to over achievement, to imbalance. In our lives together we can also be driven to excess and over achievement often at the expense of others. My commitment to myself as I finish this sabbatical time is to be more attentive to those things that contribute to imbalance and to introduce in my own life a fuller sense of the spirit of Sabbath, God's gift for restoration and for wholeness. It is good to be back among you, good to be rested, and good to return to this ministry we share in the Southeast Conference in this season of great hope and extravagant possibilities.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs

"Grace to you, and peace..."

Many Gifts, One Spirit

By Betsy Flory

Ken Medema listened carefully to the story of a young woman in the auditorium. After a few moments pause, he began to sing her story back to her with lovely melody, complex harmony and haunting lyrics. The auditorium was hushed, the people in it transfixed. A short while later, the crowd erupted into spontaneous dance as Ken played a rousing set of songs which poked fun at our practices of consuming and acquiring. Later still, yard-long "Holy Spirit" banners appeared from nowhere, snaking their way through the auditorium on the arms of people of many ages and colors. Wherever the Spirit moved, dancing and clapping broke out and followed, until the whole room was wrapped around with Spirit and song and dance.

This is just one of the memorable experiences from the Southern Regional Youth Event, *Many Gifts, One Spirit* at Epworth-by-the-Sea this July. There were many others—people from across three Conferences made their way through some heavy-duty conversations about difference; we spent time listening to Julie Peebles teach us how to have those conversations; we heard the awesome talents of Raleigh United Church youth performing "Cotton Patch Gospel," Oakland UCC who performed parts of "Godspell", the youth from Community Congregational, Montgomery singing in morning jams, and the youth from Savannah's First Church in their choral reading of scripture in our opening worship. At the driftwood Nature Center, we built new enclosures for injured or rehabilitating birds. Others of us learned to seine in the surf and then examined the wildlife living where the land meets the sea. Interestingly, we found that in nature, ecology requires diversity!

Youth attended interesting workshops with topics ranging from social concerns, prayer, being kind to one another, and



"Windows to God" were a part of the call to worship each day during the Regional Youth Event.



Youth dance with colorful fabric, symbolizing the spontaneous movement of the Holy Spirit.

surviving natural disasters. One workshop was even one on playing! There was swimming, basketball, games in the cabins and an absolutely awesome talent show - I personally have not laughed that hard or long in a long time.

This event fostered a real spirit of cooperation among the Southern, Southeast and Florida Conferences for the first regional youth event held in a long time. The adult leadership and the planning team worked hard to embody the Christian principles of honoring the many gifts for the good of the body of Christ. With the success of this event, we can look forward to the next one in 2006.

Betsy Flory is the Coordinator of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference. You may contact her at bflory@secucc.org.

VOICES & VISIONS

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The mission of Voices & Vision is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members.

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The Hand of Fellowship

Continued from page 1

Kierkegaard's great truth that God is the only audience in worship is often quoted at Church of the Savior. Following the lectionary cycle, Graham describes their worship as well-ordered, but allowing room for spontaneity. Characterized by much involvement from members, worship is participatory with responses and litanies, and hymns. In addition to worship, Church of the Savior speaks its voice in the community through ministry. "We open our doors to all people regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation," shares Graham. In addition, they operate a Day School five days a week for 80 children, sustain an AIDS Care Team that provides on-going care for care receivers, and they assist with providing on sight food preparation for a homeless shelter.

As their web site says, "It is no small matter to bear the name Church of the Savior." Members hope that after your first visit you will be able to say to yourself, "That really did seem like a church of the Savior." Located at 1950 Old Alabama Road in Roswell, Church of the Savior worships at 10:55 a.m. on Sundays. To find out additional information, visit their web site at www.cofsavior.org.



Victory Church

Victory Church Stone Mountain, Georgia

Dr. Kenneth Samuel, pastor and founder of the 15 year old congregation describes Victory Church as progressive, young, and inclusive. While focused on a solid biblical foundation, they host a vibrant and interactive style of worship. Samuel, who has led the church to grow to over 6000 members, is described as carrying out his ministry with enthusiasm, a positive Spirit, and vigor! Reflecting on

their decision to affiliate with the UCC, Samuel shares, "Because I believe that racism, sexism, and homophobia are three heads to the same monster, I am proud to be a part of a denomination which celebrates the radically inclusive love of Christ for all persons, regardless of race, gender, class or sexual orientation. I am proud to be associated with a denomination whose stand against oppression dates back to the Amistad event, and whose commitment to the liberation of all people has continued through the Civil Rights Era to this present age of international imperialism."

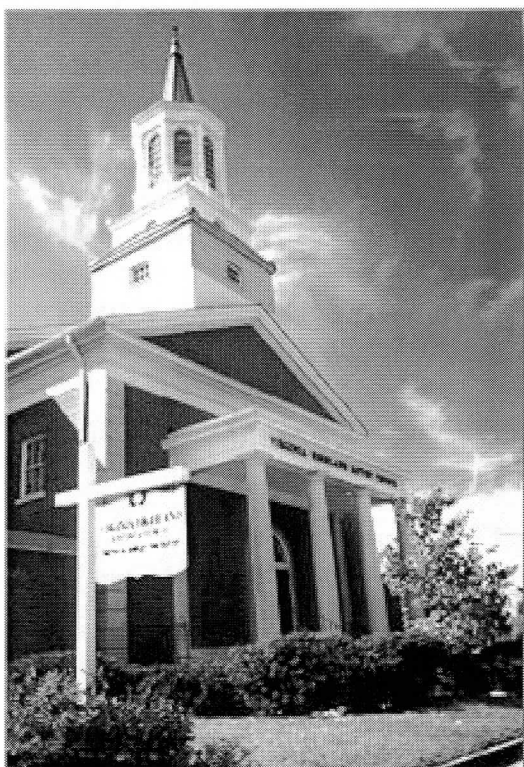
Victory is guided by a strong mission to address *the total needs of the total person*, seeking to develop a full complement of ministries and services which speak to the spiritual and physical; the personal and the political; the psychological and the economic dimensions of human life. Victory's hope and dream for the future is to continue the discipleship of believers, the evangelism of the lost, and the empowerment of the community. Toward realizing their dreams, they make their presence known in the community through over 50 outreach ministries that serve as a resource for the congregation as well as the Stone Mountain community, including an Academy, mentoring programs, and a partnership with Project Open Hand.

Located at 1170 Hairston Road in Stone Mountain, Victory offers a broad range of Sunday School classes and educational programs. Worship is offered on Sundays at 8:00 and 11:15 a.m. and Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. To learn more about the ministry of Victory church, visit www.victoryfortheworld.org.

Virginia-Highland Church A Baptist and UCC Congregation Atlanta, Georgia

Members of Virginia-Highland Church declare in their covenant together to "embrace joyfully our differences," describing themselves as "a community of diversity; an inclusive community of faith where everyone is welcome." This highly eclectic congregation is a supporting member of Intown Community Assistance, An Ecumenical Association of Churches in the Druid Hills, Virginia-Highland and Poncey-Highland communities. In this partnership, they engage in social ministries that are vital to inner-city neighborhoods.

Virginia-Highland embodies the best of historic Baptist principles, principles that found their development in the broader free-church tradition of the Protestant movement. "In the UCC, our church has found a denominational home that clearly expresses



*Virginia-Highland Church
Baptist and CC Congregation*

these principles held dear by the congregation. This will be the DNA by which Virginia-Highland charts its course into the future," states Rev. Tim Shirley, Senior Minister since 1990. While affiliating with the UCC, their continuing membership in the Alliance of Baptists is also representative of growing partnership between the UCC and the Alliance.

This church became nationally known because of the bold and brave stand it made regarding inclusivity, particularly the welcoming of gay and lesbian persons into every aspect of congregational life. "This congregation clearly desires to live on the cutting edge of ecclesiastical life, living as a laboratory for discovering what it means to live the gospel as Christ's church in these post-modern, post-denominational days," says Shirley.

Visitors to Virginia-Highland Church experience a "highly liturgical" approach to worship. Using sources available from a variety of denominations, Virginia-Highland embodies an ecumenical flavor. But even with a liturgical approach to worship, much care is taken to insure that worship has an element of hospitality and warmth that

discourages a cold and stuffy ritualistic aura often associated with liturgical worship. Located at 743 Virginia Avenue, the Virginia Highland Church worships at 11:00 a.m. each Sunday. Learn more about them at www.vhbc.org.

The Southeast Conference has much to anticipate as the leaders and members of these churches share their diverse gifts and insights with us. Already we have been invited to and inspired by Victory's International African Summit and Church of the Savior's workshop on Becoming Transformational Communities. We can look forward to how their presence among us will enrich us, challenge us, and strengthen us.

Mary Kendrick Moore, M.Div., is the Director of Communications for the Southeast Conference. Significant contributions to this article were provided by the pastors and the web sites of the featured congregations.

After the Introduction

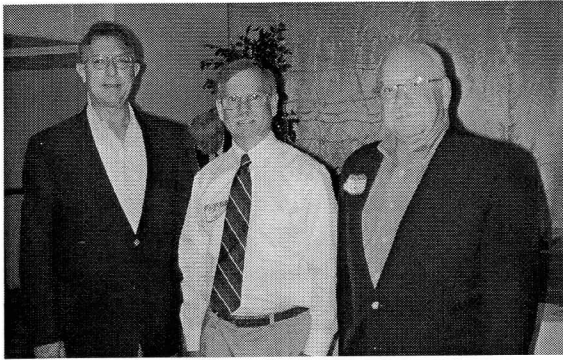
An introduction is only the beginning. Relationships grow when we spend time together, share ideas, and participate in activities together. Consider the following ways to build relationship with new churches as we welcome them to the Southeast Conference.

- Plan a youth activity or retreat together.
- Co-sponsor a speaker or conference on a topic significant to your congregations.
- Participate together in a short term or ongoing mission project, such as a community mission or conference work camp.
- Plan a joint community worship service

While this article features churches joining the UCC, don't forget the ministry of introduction and community building with our new church starts and other established congregations. Where two or more congregations are gathered, collaborative ministry expands our ability to share the good news of God's kingdom.

GA/SC Association Holds Annual Meeting

On September 13-14, over ten churches were represented at the annual meeting of the Georgia/South Carolina association, held at Virginia-Highland Church, a Baptist and UCC congregation in Atlanta, GA. Co-hosting the meeting



Dr. Stan Hastey, President of the Alliance of Baptists, greets Dave Speno, Moderator, and Tim Downs.

was GSN Ministries, an open and affirming congregation from the predominantly African-American community. These two congregations, who share the same meeting space, personify for us in their respective worship styles the diversity of our association. The wonderful hospitality and fellowship extended to our association by these churches is truly appreciated.

Dr. Stan Hastey, President of the Alliance for Baptists, delivered the keynote address on Saturday morning. Hastey presented a bold vision the Alliance brings to both mission and ecumenical partnerships and recounted an informative view of the history of the Baptist movement in the United States. Following Hastey's address, he and Tim Downs responded to questions regarding the dialogue on partnership between the UCC and Alliance. Sharing views of the gifts and challenges they anticipate, they both presented the possibility of a relationship that will contribute positively to the lives of both groups.

In addition to an inspiring program, an ecumenical council was convened to consider the ordination of Betsy Flory to the ministry. Betsy delivered a profoundly moving sermon in illustration of her understanding of ministry and was welcomed by the association with enthusiasm. Likely, all attendees would say worship was a highlight of the event. A spirited opening worship was led by GSN Ministries, with Rev. Kathy Martin preaching. On Saturday, we worshiped in the liturgical style of Virginia-Highland Church, with

Rev. Kim Buchanan preaching. Echoing her focus on the challenges and gifts of the diversity among us, Bill Cox, member of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, GA, states, "During the three day event, I attended different (and I do mean different!) services in which we all worshiped the same God. Diversity was not just talk – you could see it present in our association. It made me feel good to be a Christian and a member of the United Church of Christ."

ALA-TEN Hosts Celebrative Fallfest by Mike Stroud

This year may go down in history as the year the Alabama-Tennessee Association made a new start at gathering its people, not just to carry out needed business but to be the church worshipping God. September 20-21 marked the inaugural Fallfest at First United Church of Christ in Nashville, the first such event in middle Tennessee in

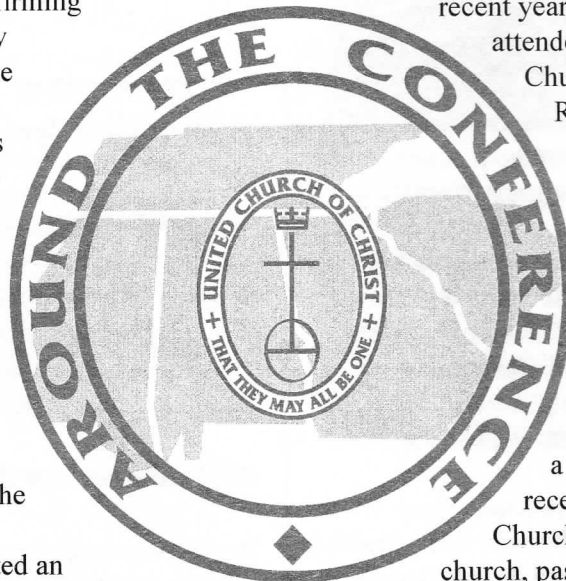
recent years. Friday evening, almost 100 people attended worship led by members of the Church and Ministry Committee and the Rev. Dr. Wilson Q. Welch, Jr., longtime pastor of Howard Church. The Rev. Jennifer Crane Moss preached on Micah 6:1-8, *What Does God Require of Us?*

After a service of Holy Communion, the Rev. Tom Baird of Knoxville's Church of the Savior, and Church and Ministry Chair, led a service of worship celebrating the reception of Beloved Community Church in Birmingham into the UCC. The church, pastored by Rev. Angie Wright, began in her living room in 1999.

The Saturday morning program featured Bible study conducted by the Rev. Dr. Dan Rosemergy, Pastor of Brookmeade Church and Brookmeade member Shelli Yoder, who is studying for the ministry at nearby Vanderbilt Divinity School. Morning workshops conducted by association committee members allowed participants to learn about the various programs and ministries of the association.

From inspiring worship to challenging dialogue, Fallfest was an enthusiastic time of fellowship! Many thanks are expressed to the people of First United Church, for being such kind and caring hosts for the event.

Mike Stroud is Editor of the ALA-TENN Advance.



Students Attend East Coast Seminar Conference

On October 3-6, the Southeast Conference sent a delegation of our students in-care to the East Coast Seminar Conference, a gathering of seminarians hosted to introduce them to the United Church of Christ. Over 80 persons were present for this biannual event held at the Craigville Conference Center in Cape Cod, MA.

The theme of this year's conference was *UCC: It's Our Bag*, highlighting the structure and ministries of the UCC. Numerous national leaders addressed the group, including Ms. Bernice Powell Jackson, the Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries of the UCC and Dr. John Thomas, the President and General Minister of the UCC. A rousing game of jeopardy then allowed participants to compete enthusiastically to demonstrate their knowledge of the UCC. Tim Downs participated in a panel responding to the question "What does it mean to be a church on the margins?" Seminarians had an opportunity to be in dialogue together on topics of national interest and meet many persons who serve as mentors to students in-care.

Financial support for seminarians to attend the conference was provided by the national UCC, as well as by the GA/SC Association of the Southeast Conference. Students attending from the Southeast Conference included Leandra Casson, a student at Candler and member of Victory Church; Derek Rice, a student at ITC and member of Rush Memorial Congregational Church; Juanita Simmons, a member of Victory Church who is completing her undergraduate degree; and Linda Smith, a student at Candler and member at Central Congregational Church in Atlanta. Additional participants from the Southeast Conference included Rev. Kathy Martin, Pastor of GSN Ministries, and Marvin Morgan from the faculty of Interdenominational Theological Center. Appreciation is extended to Linda Smith for her excellent work organizing the Southern presence at this event.

One did not have to be present long at the East Coast Seminar Conference to realize that the only UCC conference that sent African American students to this very important event was the Southeast Conference. This is a vivid reminder to all of us, that every effort we make to cultivate and nurture the richly talented seminary students of all ethnic groups from the southeast provides a highly valuable service to the whole church. This is an awesome responsibility that we dare not take lightly.

Marvin Morgan

Director, Continuing Education & Certificate Program
Interdenominational Theological Center,
Atlanta, GA

I bring home very fond memories of the East Coast Seminar Conference. The opportunity to meet and get to know other UCC students and staff from the national and regional office was incredible! Workshops were very informative, worship was meaningful to our journey as students, and the encouragement and support of our future ministries was strong. And we had fun too! I highly recommend this event for all UCC seminarians. I felt proud to be a part of the UCC family.

Linda Smith

Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA

One of the prevailing convictions I received as a result of attending the conference was to be more determined in my ministry to spread the "good news." The good news of Jesus Christ has to be the ultimate focus. I saw that the United Church of Christ is building and investing in people who will emerge as leaders in our churches, communities and places of influence. I am proud to be a member of a ministry, congregation and fellowship that is fearless in proclaiming to a seemingly spiritually famished land the good news that salvation through Jesus Christ is available to all, indifferent to race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. Thanks to the Southeast Conference for supporting this incredible opportunity.

Juanita Simmons

Victory Church, Atlanta, GA

A New Look for Voices & Visions

We have updated the graphic design of Voices & Vision, the newsletter for the Southeast Conference. If you have any feedback about our newsletter or wish to submit articles, please contact the editor, Mary Kendrick Moore, at mmoore@secucc.org or Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org.

Conference Probes Relationship of Religion and Conflict

By Isaac Baroi

The joys and challenges of interfaith interaction and activism were evident as more than 200 people from a multiplicity of religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds gathered in Decatur, GA to examine religion's role in creating, colluding with, and resisting violence in a world that appears addicted. Rev. Dr. Gilbert (Budd) Friend-Jones, senior pastor of the Atlanta-based Central Congregational UCC and co-chair of the conference on *Religion and Conflict: Cause or Cure*, states, "This is a time that world religious communities must engage in the deepest soul searching. Our search should be with faith and beyond our faith. We cannot simply disclaim terrorism and violence as distortions or abuses of otherwise genuinely religious impulses. We must identify the pathology of violence for what it is, and purge those things in our respective traditions that contribute to the world's stockpile of hatred."

Event speakers included Bishop Dr. Margot Kaessmann, widely regarded as the "mother" of the World Council Initiative called *The Decade to Overcome Violence*. Stressing that every religion has an obligation to call for peace, she reminded her audience that nonviolence and non-resistance are not the same. Christians must, she said, "take as a challenge to set footmarks on God's future" through their efforts at a just peace.

The obligation to call for peace is complicated by factors both external and internal to religion, noted conference presenter, Imam A. Rashied Omar, Coordinator of the Joan B.Kroc Institute's Project on Religion, Conflict and Peace Building based at the University of Notre Dame. Omar,

active in the interreligious solidarity movement against apartheid, said, "Religious violence does not occur in a political and structural vacuum. Furthermore, if a society and its politics are violent and unhappy, its mode of religious expression is likely to be the same."

The potential for violence is present within religions as well. "All religions allow for and legitimate violence under certain conditions," Omar said, noting that other-

We are challenged to acknowledge this reality and find authentic ways of dealing constructively with these texts."

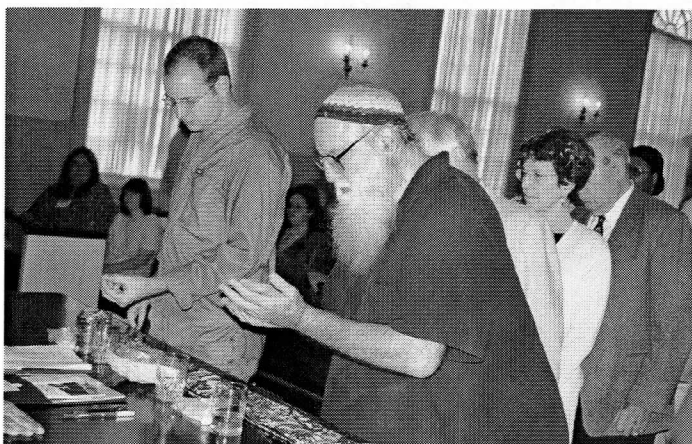
develop a theology of religious pluralism and nurture dialogue and solidarity among faith groups, participate in interreligious peace building, accept the prophetic role of religion as the moral conscience of society, and engage in global action campaigns.

The conference extended our role in violence to our neglect of the earth. The need to end the violence against our environment was addressed by Tom Blue Wolf, founder and president of Earthkeepers. Noting the decrease in songbirds, growing scarcity of water, and other environmental degradation, he asked, "How long can

present danger but a violation of our obligations to the children.

This weekend event, sponsored by the Paul Rice Center for Spiritual Practice at Central UCC, the Dean of Chapel and Religious Life at Emory University, and the U.S. Commission for the World Council of Churches, inspired deep reflection and called for bold action. "Love does not ignore the past, but tries to understand it," shares Friend-Jones. "Love does not blame, but seeks deeper understanding." His closing remarks are a call to all of us across our Southeast Conference, "What we can do together, we should do together."

his family a year and half ago on political and religious homeland by the Taliban because of his participation in



conference attendees in a prayer of benediction.

CONFERENCE

Concerns & Celebrations

Our Sympathy

- Our sympathy is extended to *Rev. Kate Hauk* and her family following the death of her son, Thomas on August 21st at age 16. Kate serves as a Hospice chaplain in Atlanta and is a member of Central Congregational, UCC.
- Our sympathy is extended to *Rev. Bob Rezash* and his family following the death of his mother in February. Bob recently retired to Pleasant Hill, TN.

Our Prayers

- Rev. Vant Hardaway*, pastor of First United Church of Christ in Sweetwater, TN, continues to care for his mother during her extended illness.
- Rev. Bennie Liggins* and his wife, Carolyn, faced the sudden and serious illness of Carolyn's mother in Memphis during the summer and she continues recuperation. Bennie is pastor of Community Congregational UCC in Montgomery, AL and is Associate Conference Minister for New Church Development.

- Rev. Carol Jean Miller* is completing a course of radiation, while confident in a good prognosis as she moves forward. Carol Jean, a UCC minister, recently retired from a ministry of community outreach at Central Presbyterian Church, Atlanta.

Our Celebrations

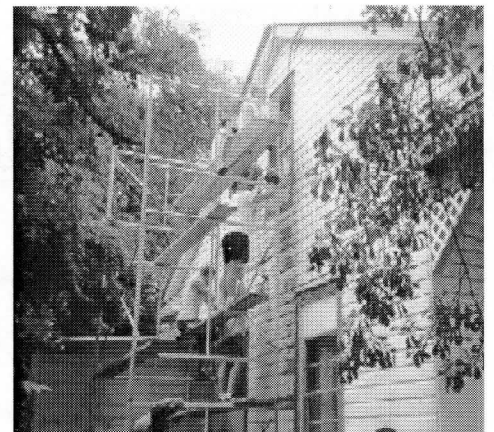
- Rev. John Mingus*, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga, returned from a restful and restorative sabbatical including vacation in Florida and writing on congregational renewal.
- Rev. John Gill*, pastor of Church of the Savior in Knoxville, TN, returned from his sabbatical which included extensive travel in Central and Latin America.
- A worship service celebrating the reception of *Beloved Community United Church of Christ* in Birmingham, AL into the UCC was held on September 20. The service was led by Rev. Tom Baird of Church of the Savior, Knoxville, TN. *Rev. Angie Wright* is Pastor of Beloved.

Back Bay Mission Awarded \$100,000 Contract by the City of Biloxi

Back Bay Mission was recently awarded a \$100,000 contract to rehab houses of low and moderate income persons within the City of Biloxi. This contract follows a year-long pilot program, which began a successful partnership between the Mission's work camp program and the city. Back Bay Mission and the city are excited to work together in their shared goal of neighborhood revitalization. This represents a giant step in the mission's ability to help additional low income families with housing rehab needs.

Back Bay Mission is a community ministry of the United Church of Christ located on the Gulf Coast in Biloxi, Mississippi. Founded in 1922, the Mission has historically served the poorest of the poor in a state where many struggle for the barest necessities of life. With no UCC congregations in the entire state of Mississippi, Back Bay Mission exists as an important voice on behalf of the wider church.

Last year alone, the mission served 5,450 clients with emergency assistance needs and over 200 work campers rehabbed approximately 20 homes for the poor.



Back Bay Mission work campers rehab houses for needy families.

Churches throughout the Southeast Conference are invited to assist Back Bay in their ministries during the Christmas season. Churches may offer a financial gift or sponsor an *angel tree* for the purchase of gifts for needy families. To request names for the *angel tree*, please contact Back Bay Mission prior to November 27 by calling 228/432-0301. Contributions may be sent to 1012 Division Street, Biloxi, MS 39533-0509. For additional information on Back Bay Mission, visit their web site at www.backbaymission.org.

Backpacking: A Metaphor for Youth Ministry

By Betsy Flory

Southeast Conference youth (and several adults) recently spent a weekend camping and hiking on Blood Mountain - *in the pouring-down rain*. For two days, we laid aside our usual practices - of going to school or work, going *inside* when it rains, of surrounding ourselves with stuff and music and images, and of being overwhelmingly busy. We reduced our world to essentials - making fire to cook, carrying only the things we needed for shelter or food, carefully putting one foot in front of the other, and watching to make sure none were lost. For some of us, laying aside our everyday practices and taking up new ones allowed us to be different people on the mountain than we are in our everyday lives. For some, it was a scary; for others it was liberating and exhilarating. Even as we sloshed off the mountain, there were grins.

This weekend offers a good description of youth ministry. Like all Christian ministry, it is about transformation - about becoming different people than the world says we are. In this hard, uphill work, you must always weigh whether your most beloved practices are too heavy for the trail, or will turn out to be something you shouldn't have

left behind. You can look as if you don't have enough sense to come in out of the rain!

You pray daily for "mountaintop experiences" for your young people. More often than not, you will never know if your charges reach the top because you rarely get to finish the journey with them. Yet, the rewards are deep - sometimes you do step off the mountain and see the grins. Sometimes you do glimpse the future in their faces and see the gospel growing within them.

There is an often unspoken assumption that youth ministry is what you do on the way to doing real ministry with adults. But will there be any adults to receive our ministry if we do not take the care and energy and imagination to share the gospel with our youth in ways that make sense to them? Who will carry the good news to all the world, if not those nurtured in their youth to believe it?

Betsy Flory is the Coordinator of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference. You may contact her at bflory@secucc.org.

Conference Calendar

NOVEMBER

- 16** ALA/TEN Executive Committee Meeting, Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN
- 22** ALA/TEN Church & Ministry Committee Meeting, Pilgrim Congregational, Chattanooga, TN
- 23** Leadership Workshop with Vertie Powers, GSN Ministries, Atlanta, GA
- 28** THANKSGIVING DAY, Conference Office Closed
- 29** THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY, Conference Office Closed

DECEMBER

- 1** WORLD AIDS DAY
- 7** GA/SC Church & Ministry Committee Meeting, Location to be Announced.
- 22** CHRISTMAS FUND SPECIAL MISSION OFFERING
- 24** CHRISTMAS EVE, Conference Office Closed
- 25** CHRISTMAS DAY, Conference Office Closed
- 31** NEW YEAR'S EVE

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

By Joyce Hollyday



A Compelling Coastal Tour

My car's trip odometer turned over 1,031 miles as I pulled in my driveway weary but grateful, from a "coastal tour" - but not the kind shown in travel brochures. My journey along the eastern coast of the Southeast Conference was far richer in people and history and faith than those travel agents promote. I began one Friday with a visit to the Avery Institute in Charleston, South Carolina. The largest of the schools founded by the American Missionary Association after the civil war, it is now a repository of African-American history. I spent an afternoon being inspired by letters and journals of AMA teachers who established schools in South Carolina's "low country" and sea islands. While in Charleston, I had several conversations with members of Circular Congregational Church. As Circular members have been focusing on their call to be the church in the city, I am encouraged by the congregation's enthusiasm to be faithful and involved in its downtown setting.

A leisurely hour-long drive on Saturday afternoon took me through the Francis Marion State Forest. I entered the stunning grounds of Mepkin Abbey, under a canopy of live oaks draped with Spanish moss, where Rev. Annette Nielsen serves as the abbey's librarian. As we attended evening vespers, chanting ancient psalms with the Trappist

monks, incense rose to the rafters of the stone-and-wood chapel and the sun set behind the lovely terraced gardens and river.

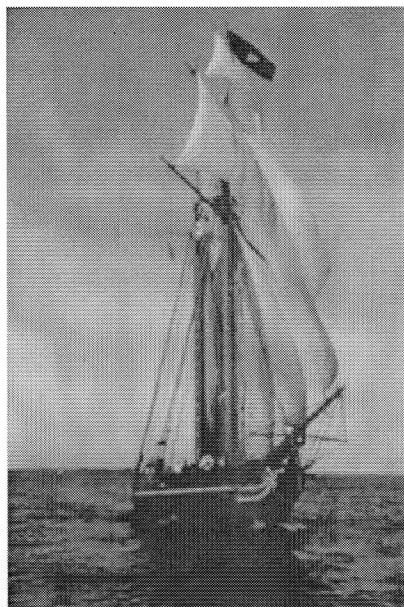
Sunday evening brought an equally unique venture as Rev. Bert Keller of Circular Church and I walked to Charleston's wharf to view the *Amistad* replica, which had just arrived to begin its tour of the Southeast coast. Two young members of

the crew, including one from Sierra Leone who is being sponsored by the United Church of Christ, gave us our own special tour. I was pleased to see the emphasis placed on the connection between the *Amistad* mutiny and the birth of the American Missionary Association, as well as a plaque honoring the support of the UCC in the building of the ship.

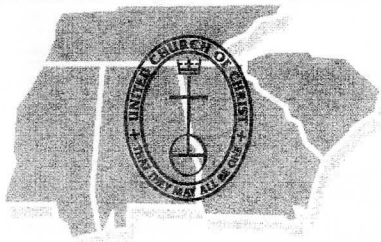
At a welcoming ceremony the next day, as we were buffeted by the breezes swirling in the wakes of tropical storms Isidore, Kyle, and Lili, the mayor of Charleston explained that wood for the frame of the ship came from huge live oaks that were uprooted when hurricane Hugo swept through the city several years ago. Sullivan's Island, just off Charleston's coast, was a central de-embarkation point for slave ships coming from Africa, and the oak wood is a compelling part of the fabric of the *Amistad* replica, a ship devoted to freedom and education about racism. Several other dignitaries spoke, including Captain Bill Pinckney of the *Amistad*, and a choir from the local School of the Arts sang African freedom hymns.

After the ceremony, I headed south to St. Simons Island, Georgia. For two days, staff members from the Southern, Florida, and Southeast Conferences of the UCC shared what's going on in the lives of our respective Conferences and discussed issues of leadership—with some good seafood and a stroll to the lighthouse and pier thrown in for relaxation. On the long trip home to North Carolina, I detoured to Sapelo Island, one of the few barrier islands off the Georgia and South Carolina coasts that has not been overtaken by golf-course development and resorts for the affluent. The islands were a haven for agitators for freedom before the civil war, and the home of several pioneering schools afterward, and Sapelo looks now much as it did then. I let out a sigh when I finally got to my driveway nine hours later. I was thankful to be home—but even more thankful to have the privilege of traveling, meeting so many fine and faithful people, and working for the Southeast Conference.

Editor's Note: For additional information on the Amistad and its tour of the southeast, visit their web site at www.amistadamerica.org.



The Amistad Freedom Schooner



MANY VOICES, ONE IN CHRIST

***Southeast Conference of the
United Church of Christ***

750 West Peachtree Street NW
Atlanta, GA 30308-1132

*All praise to the Spirit,
provider, defender;
you offer us freedom,
to follow or stray,
empowering all by
the hope you engender.
Grant wisdom and courage
to follow your way.*

Lavon Baylor

*A contemporary reinterpretation of
The traditional Thanksgiving hymn,
We Gather Together.*

*Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy
before the Lord who comes to judge the earth.*



*O give thanks to the Lord,
for the Lord is good;
for God's steadfast love
endures forever!*

*A Song of Thanksgiving
I Chronicles 16:32-34.*